

Land Acquisition a Benefit for Wildlife and Anglers

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

In 1999 the Dillon Field Office acquired more than 2,200 acres along the Beaverhead River near a landmark known as Pipe Organ Rock. The goal was to acquire the remaining patented mining claims which intruded into the large tract to help “round-out” the larger purchase. That dream recently became reality when the Dillon FO was able to use emergency Land and Water Conservation Fund money to acquire 80 acres of patented mining claims and another 5.5 acres known as the Frampton property.

Realty specialist Jeff Daugherty completed the transaction started by former Dillon FO employee Russ Sorensen. The lands along the Beaverhead River are important for their cultural values – in fact, there is a known Lewis and Clark campsite nearby. The area also has high public value for its recreation opportunities, access, and outstanding fish, wildlife and wetland habitat.

The BLM was able to use the LWCF emergency funding because of the diverse resource values of the area and high value to the public. The tracts are located about 10 miles southwest of Dillon along the Beaverhead River. The acquisition consolidates BLM ownership in a continuous two-mile stretch of river and protects the immediate area from development.

The BLM has completed a waterfowl project on the lowlands portion of the tract acquired in 1999. The project consists of a shallow pond designed by, and in partnership with, Ducks Unlimited. Even with the current drought, the pond attracts multiple species of waterfowl.

Management decisions for the newly acquired property will be made through the Dillon Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. A draft of the document is currently out for public review until July 12.



This overview of the Beaverhead River shows the property recently acquired in the Pipe Organ Rock area. Emergency funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund were used for the 85+ acre purchase.

(Photo by Jim Roscoe)

Listen and Learn

In the business of public land management, doing the right thing isn't always easy. Sometimes, in fact, it can be downright painful.

As a multiple-use agency, the BLM is directed to manage public lands and their resource values to best meet the present and future needs of the American people. For any given issue, there are often many strong views about just what the right course of action is. All of these views are important and valid and must be heard. We continually do our best to gather these views, sort them out, and then, using our experience and the laws that guide our management, make the best decision. It's a big part of what land management is all about.

We're involved in several major planning efforts right now. For example, we recently began the scoping process for the Blackleaf Environmental Impact Statement, which deals with an application to drill for natural gas on the Rocky Mountain Front. I probably don't need to tell you that Blackleaf is a hot button issue, with the views ranging from ardent support for drilling to opinions that adamantly oppose it. Likewise, coal bed natural gas, the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument land use plan, and our ongoing resource management plans are also divisive issues.

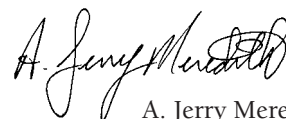
With all the controversy surrounding such issues, it's tempting to merely retreat to our conference rooms and craft a decision without the distractions of conflicting public opinions and the media attention that conflict always generates. Choosing that course of action may sound like a lot less work and, at least in the short run, less discomfort. Let's face it. Strongly held opinions are

not always expressed calmly, or with much appreciation for a differing point of view.

But listening is the right thing to do. I am impressed with the outreach I see being done in every office. Extra Resource Advisory Council meetings, informal discussions with individuals, meetings with local officials, conversations with other government entities and meetings with public interest groups are taking place virtually every day. Teams are thoughtfully and respectfully reviewing public comments. Information is being shared, even when we know it may cause those with entrenched positions to set off another round of attacks, or even another round of lawsuits.

A few years ago, an athletic shoe company had the advertising slogan of "No pain, no gain." That may be as true of making multiple-use decisions as it is of getting into good physical shape. Both come at a cost. Both require additional time. But in the end, both will be well worth the extra effort.

Common sense tells us that we can't make every application for every activity into a long and expensive effort. And experience has shown that there will never be enough discussion, or enough research, for some. But, in Montana and the Dakotas, we want to continue to develop a reputation of being accessible and good listeners – even when it may mean a little additional discomfort. Keep up the good work.



A. Jerry Meredith
Associate State Director



They proceeded on . . .

Summer 1804



July 4

Expedition marks first Fourth of July ever celebrated west of the Mississippi by firing keelboat's cannon, drinking extra ration of whiskey, and naming a creek (near what is now Atchison, Kansas) Independence Creek.

August 3

First official council between representatives of United States and western Indians occurs north of present-day Omaha, when Corps of Discovery meets with small delegation of Oto and Missouri Indians. Captains establish routine for subsequent Indian councils: hand out peace medals, 15-star flags, and gifts; parade men and show off technology (magnets, compasses, telescopes, Lewis's air gun); give speech saying Indians have new "great father" far to the east and promising future of peace and prosperity if tribes don't make war on whites or other tribes.

August 20

Near what is now Sioux City, Iowa, Sergeant Charles Floyd becomes the expedition's first casualty from what was probably a burst appendix. (Also becomes first United States soldier to die west of Mississippi.) Captains name hilltop where he is buried Floyd's Bluff and nearby stream Floyd's River.

August 30

Expedition holds friendly council with Yankton Sioux (near what is now Yankton, South Dakota). According to Yankton oral tradition, when a baby is born, Lewis wraps him in a United States flag and declares him "an American."

(source: www.PBS.org)

Logging/Fuels Treatment Begins Near Helena

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

After several years of planning and delays, timber harvest and fuels reduction began this spring near Clancy and in the south Elkhorn Mountains south of Helena. Contractors will treat approximately 1,420 acres of forest and woodlands through a combination of timber harvest, tree thinning, hazardous fuels reduction and prescribed burning.

Planning started in 1997 as the Clancy Unionville Landscape Vegetation Project in partnership with the Helena National Forest and in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The project was put on hold after the severe fire season of 2000 when higher priority rehabilitation and restoration work was needed in areas affected by wildfire, especially near Canyon Ferry and Boulder Hill.

The project was made more complex due to housing developments on adjacent private lands and increasing use of public lands which sometimes led to user conflicts. The logging/fuels project is designed to accommodate a wide range of activities, reduce the risk to users, and minimize wildlife

disturbance and soil erosion.

When the Butte Field Office proceeded with implementation in September 2003, both projects were protested. The protests were denied and the Interior Board of Land Appeals affirmed BLM's decisions in January paving the way for project implementation.



This spring, contractors anxiously awaited the right conditions to begin work near Helena. Photo by Mike Small.



RACK 'EM AND STACK 'EM---BLM Jordan Field Station Fire Operations Supervisor Daniel Williams shuttles bundles of fence posts during a fencing materials distribution event for area landowners who lost fences during the Missouri Breaks Complex fires of 2003. Photo by Mark E. Jacobsen

BLM Distributes Fencing Materials

Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City Field Office

Staff members from the BLM Jordan Field Station and Miles City Field Office distributed around \$76,000 worth of fencing materials April 27 through 29.

The materials were provided by the BLM and distributed out of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service station to replace fences destroyed by the Missouri Breaks Complex fires of 2003, which burned over 130,000 acres of both public and private land.

According to BLM Rangeland Management Specialist Jeff Gustad, the materials represent approximately 45 miles of fencing. Dollars for the materials became available through fire rehabilitation funds for the replacement of burned fences on BLM-administered land.

“Gem” now in Public Ownership

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

Public ownership of the historic Ward Ranch adjacent to Hauser Lake became reality on February 26 when the final 1,324 acres were acquired by the BLM Butte Field Office. In this phase of the transaction, BLM acquired approximately 970 acres through a land exchange facilitated by The Conservation Fund (TCF). TCF also donated 354 acres to complete the transfer into public ownership.

The BLM and TCF have worked cooperatively since 1998 to acquire the 2,208 acre ranch along the Missouri River. The completion was rewarding for Steve Hartmann, Assistant Field Manager, and Gary Beals, Realty Specialist, who have worked for years along with other BFO employees to make the exchange a reality. The first phase of the exchange was completed in 2002. Except for one small parcel, the ranch is surrounded by lands administered by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service. The ranch has high public value because of the Hauser Lake shoreline, excellent big game winter range and waterfowl habitat.

Having the ranch in public ownership will provide excellent recreational opportunities for the public, protect resource and cultural values, and maintain the “open space” character of the area. Management for the newly acquired area will be determined through development of the Butte Resource Management Plan, currently underway. Interim management will provide protection for the privately-held ranch buildings, while allowing dispersed recreation opportunities.

The historic Ward Ranch dates from 1913, prior to the building of Hauser Dam. Nellie Ward, the elderly surviving family member, is a wealth of information relating to the history of the area and a witness to the transformation of the area from rangeland and timber to subdivisions. Two members of the Ward family have a “lifetime tenancy” agreement with the BLM, which allows them to continue living on a seven-acre fenced parcel on the property.

When the ranch was first offered for sale, one of the ambitious proposals included housing developments, condominiums, a golf course and marina. The Ward family valued the open space character of the ranch and the critical wildlife habitat (mostly winter range for big game and excellent waterfowl habitat) provided by the ranch.

Recently, a work crew from the Butte Field Office spent a day in the field getting acquainted with the new property and building a fence to protect historic ranch structures.



TOP: Huey Long and Pete Armstrong work to complete a fence at the recently acquired Ward Ranch near Hauser Lake.

CENTER: Steve Hartmann, Dave Pacioretti, and John Sandford helped build a fence to protect one of the historic Ward Ranch buildings.

BOTTOM: The original Ward Ranch home was fenced for protection shortly after the ranch became publicly owned.

Photos by Vickie Satterlee

Horsethief Hazard – A Model Project

Ann Boucher, MSO

Secretary Gale Norton and the Office of Fire and Aviation recently recognized the Billings Field Office for its “superior accomplishments” in completing the environmental assessment for the Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project near Roundup.

The Horsethief project was one of seven pilot projects bureauwide that used expedited environmental assessment procedures as outlined in the President’s Healthy Forest Initiative. It has helped establish that needed projects, especially fuels reduction efforts, can be done efficiently while still fulfilling the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and fully involving the public.

The Horsethief Hazard project will serve as a model for similar efforts in the future.

“This new generation of environmental assessments will allow us to move more quickly to improve the health of our forests and rangelands as well as to better protect people and communities from wildland fire,” wrote Secretary Norton in a letter to Billings Field Manager Sandy Brooks. “I hope that you and your staff look back at what you have accomplished with a great sense of satisfaction.”

The Horsethief Hazard project area is just west of Roundup in the wildland-urban interface. BLM-administered lands in the 10,300-acre project area contain overstocked stands of ponderosa pine and juniper that are very receptive to ignition. The goal is to reduce fuels to protect the town of Roundup, structures in the Horsethief subdivision, and natural resources. On-the-ground work began last fall and will



The Billings Field Office received this award from Secretary Norton this spring for its work on the Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction project. Photo by Greg Albright

take several seasons to complete.

Although the award was directed at the Billings Field Office, Sandy noted that many others from the Miles City Field Office and the Montana State Office also contributed to the project.

BLM Legacy Program for 2004

The objective of the Legacy Program is to reunite senior and retired resource professionals, who performed land treatments or resource management practices 25 or more years ago, with our current specialists and field office managers and to have an on-the-ground dialog about those past land treatments, their outcomes, and current resource conditions. The BLM Legacy Program for FY 2004 will emphasize resource monitoring, focusing on the permanent plots, transects, and photo points implemented 25 or more years ago. Many BLM senior staff and retirees were involved during their careers with installing these monitoring systems for the range, forestry, wildlife, watershed, and cultural resource programs.

Depending on funding availability in 2004, there might also be opportunities to develop Legacy projects on topics related to recreation, minerals, and prescribed fire.

Senior employees, retirees, and field offices interested in participating in a Legacy project should contact Lee Barkow (303.236.1142) (Lee_Barkow@blm.gov) or Bruce Van Haveren (303.236.0161) (bvanhave@blm.gov) at the BLM National Science and Technology Center.



Spotlighting Ferrets

Katie Baltrusch, Montana State Office

Three or four times each year, BLM staff and volunteers swap their day jobs for a week of night shifts conducting spotlight surveys for black-footed ferrets.

The black-footed ferret, considered the most endangered mammal in the U.S., was reintroduced to prairie dog towns on BLM land in Phillips County in 2001. Ferrets are dependent on prairie dogs—they eat prairie dogs, live in prairie dog burrows, and are most active at night when they hunt prairie dogs.

Biologists capitalize on this night-time activity by using spotlights to monitor survival. Spotlighting efforts run for six nights each in April, August, and November/December. The April survey measures winter survival and indicates the number of animals going into the breeding season. The August survey measures how many litters of young (kits) were born and which females successfully reproduced. The November/December survey occurs only if BLM releases ferrets, to monitor their survival 30 days following the release.

The BLM has released ferrets annually since 2001 to supplement the population in Phillips County, which is not yet self-sustaining. These ferrets come from a captive breeding program managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the future, BLM may receive ferrets from wild-born populations as reintroduced populations in other states continue to grow.

Identification and Location

The ferrets BLM releases come equipped with two microchips encoded with identifying numbers, one near the head and one near the tail. Starting just after dark, spotlighters drive around prairie dog towns, panning across the burrows to catch the ferrets' unique brilliant green "eyeshine." Once identified, a ferret is followed with a spotlight until it enters a burrow, then the ring of a microchip reader is placed around the hole and covered with a thin layer of

grass. The reader identifies chipped ferrets as they come up through the ring. If the grass layer is disturbed and the reader doesn't record a number, the ferret is likely a wild-born kit.

The BLM attempts to re-locate these wild-born kits in October when they become independent from their mothers and are large enough to handle anesthesia. Using live traps, biologists microchip and vaccinate them against distemper before releasing them again.

The Malta Field Office manages the ferret program in Phillips County. Malta biologists, volunteers from across the state, BLM Montana State Office staff, and CMR Refuge staff provide the workforce for releases and spotlighting surveys. Volunteers help with almost all phases of ferret field work, including the spotlight survey, placing microchip readers on ferrets, live trapping, and releasing captive-bred ferrets. New volunteers ride with experienced spotlighters until they can recognize ferret eyeshine and know how to use the reading equipment. They also learn how to use a live trap. Volunteers interested in assisting with surveys may contact Valerie Kopcsó by e-mail at valerie_kopcs@blm.gov, or by telephone at (406) 654-5100.



The reader consists of a ring and data reader attached to a battery.

Continued Challenges

Ferrets were considered extinct between 1972 and 1981, when a ranch dog near Meeteetse, Wyoming, brought one home. In 1985, the captive breeding program was started with ferrets from Meeteetse. Soon after, the Meeteetse population died out due to canine distemper or possibly plague, leaving the black-footed ferrets in the captive breeding program as the only known population.

The Phillips County reintroduction effort is just one piece in the puzzle of ferret recovery. There are also two other Montana reintroduction sites: the CMR Wildlife Refuge and the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Additionally, ferrets have been reintroduced in Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota and Mexico. The South Dakota and Wyoming populations have been especially successful due to lack of disease and large expanses of prairie dog town.

Since reintroduced populations are highly vulnerable to predation and disease (especially canine distemper and plague), establishing many different individual populations is a critical step in insulating the ferret from complete extinction. Research on plague is also increasingly important. BLM prairie dog towns are part of an ongoing study to determine whether survival and productivity are enhanced when an insecticide called Delta Dust is applied, compared to towns that are not dusted.

Although the ferret is unquestionably endangered, reintroduced populations are designated “experimental non-essential” under the Endangered Species Act. This designation allows flexibility for research and other uses of the land to continue. The Northern Montana Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction and Management Plan also operates on this flexi-

bility by focusing on recovering ferrets in a way that is compatible with “existing local economies and lifestyles” and “maintain[s] a positive working relationship with the local landowners.” To meet these goals, a diverse group of people, all of whom have a stake in ferret recovery, have organized into the Montana Black-footed Ferret working group. The Nature Conservancy and one private individual, both of whom hold grazing permits on the reintroduction site, also work with the group to come up with local solutions that make sense for the community and the recovery effort.



BLM volunteer Aly Piwowar releasing a black-footed ferret.

All photos courtesy of Randy Matchett, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Our Recreation Attractions . . . Check 'em out!!



Pompeys Pillar National Monument

Location

30 miles northeast of Billings, Montana

Description

Pompeys Pillar National Monument contains exceptional cultural, recreational and wildlife values and bears the only known on-site physical evidence of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Captain William Clark, his Shoshone expedition guide, Sacagawea, and her 18-month old son (nicknamed "Pompey," or "little chief"), and a crew of 11 men stopped near this 121-foot-high rock outcropping on the return trip of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. On July 25, 1806, Clark carved his signature and the date in the rock and recorded doing so in his journal. The historic signature remains today, and is accessible to visitors via a boardwalk.

Directions

From Billings, drive 30 miles east on Interstate 94 to

the Pompeys Pillar Exit (#23). Signs clearly point the way to the site, which is only half a mile off the interstate.

Visitor Activities

Interpretive tours, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, picnicking, and hiking.

Special Features

Pompeys Pillar is located at a natural ford in the Yellowstone River. As a result, the area has been a crossroads throughout history for hunters, travelers and wildlife such as the once-prominent buffalo herds. Native Americans, early explorers, fur trappers, U.S. Cavalrymen, railroad developers, and early homesteaders used the pillar as a registry of their passing. In addition to Clark's signature, the sandstone is marked with literally hundreds of other etchings and drawings, including Native American rock art.

A large and diverse wildlife population is drawn to the site's thriving riparian zone, a healthy plant community of grasses, willows, and cottonwood trees that stabilizes the river bank and provides important habitat. Today's existing ecosystem at the pillar is typical of the Yellowstone Valley as Clark would have seen it in 1806.

Permits, Fees Limitations

A per-vehicle, day-use fee is charged during the summer season. No fees are charged the rest of the year, but in the off-season, the site is open to walk-in traffic only.

Accessibility

The visitor center, gift shop and restrooms are fully accessible.

Camping and Lodging

Daytime RV parking is available during the summer, but no overnight camping is permitted. The nearest lodging is in Billings.

Food and Supplies

There are several small towns west of Pompeys Pillar along Interstate 94 where food and supplies may be purchased. These include Ballantine, Worden, and Huntley, all within 17 miles of the site.

First Aid

The nearest hospital is in Billings.

Additional Information

The visitor center is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through the end of September. The boardwalk and restrooms are open year-round. Winter access requires a walk of less than 1 mile.

Contact Information

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A New Chapter at Pompeys Pillar

Groundbreaking for a new interpretive center opened a new chapter in the history of Pompeys Pillar April 24. Actual construction began April 26.

Representatives from the Pompeys Pillar Historical Association, the Yellowstone County Commissioners, the BLM and Montana's congressional delegation offered a few brief comments before turning over the first scoops of dirt.

The 5,600-square-foot facility is scheduled for completion in May 2005 and will interpret Wil-

liam Clark's travel down the Yellowstone River in 1806. The new facility will be used to host a national Lewis and Clark Signature Event in July 2006.

The BLM purchased Pompeys Pillar in November 1991 for its historic significance and its interpretive and recreational potential. It was designated a national monument on January 17, 2001.

The Pompeys Pillar Historical Association has worked closely with BLM in the acquisition, operation and development of the site.

Between 2003 and 2006, 15 "Signature Events" are scheduled along the Lewis and Clark Trail to highlight various aspects of the famous expedition. One of these events will take place in Great Falls from June 1 to July 4, 2005, and another at Pompeys Pillar July 22-25, 2006. Two others are scheduled this year in North and South Dakota:

- Oceti Sakowin: Remembering and Educating: August 27- 28, 2004, in Chamberlain and Oacoma, South Dakota. For more information: www.travelsd.com
- Circle of Cultures, Time of Renewal & Change: October 22-31, 2004, in Bismarck, North Dakota. This event will highlight the cordial welcome that Lewis and Clark received from the earthlodge peoples of the Upper Missouri. It will also showcase the ancient peoples of North Dakota and the thriving centuries-old trading "Mecca" they operated on the Northern Plains. For more information: www.circleofcultures.com



Breaking ground for the new interpretive center at Pompeys Pillar National Monument -- from left, Jerry Meredith, BLM Associate State Director; Melodee Hanes, representing Senator Max Baucus; Brenda Hawks, representing Senator Conrad Burns; Linda Price, representing Congressman Denny Rehberg; Jim Reno, Yellowstone County Commissioner; and Dan Krum, president of the Pompeys Pillar Historical Association.

Photo by Greg Albright



Moving dirt for the new Pompeys Pillar Interpretive Center. *Photo by Suzie Havener*



An artist's rendering of the new interpretive center.

A Montana Success Story: Conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse

Story and Photos by Division of Resources Staff, Miles City Field Office

Recent estimates indicate that greater sage-grouse populations have declined about 86 percent from historic levels. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has received three petitions to list the species as threatened or endangered throughout its range.

Greater sage-grouse depend almost entirely on sagebrush for food, shelter, and protection from predators. In the summer, this species depends on the grass and plants that grow under the sagebrush to provide nesting material and cover, as well as high-protein insects for food. These insects are a critical food source for chicks in their first month of life. In winter, more than 99 percent of their diet is sagebrush leaves and buds.

The BLM Miles City Field Office and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks have long recognized the importance of the greater sage grouse and its habitat in southeastern Montana. The region provides some prime sage brush habitat, but much of it is being lost to crop land, livestock grazing, energy development and rights-of-way.

In the early 1990s, the FWP and BLM expanded their long history of cooperation to focus on the greater sage-grouse. Neil Martin, now retired regional game manager for the FWP in Miles City, and personnel from the MCFO recognized the need to collect data about sage grouse and its habitat.

Taking Inventory

Working together, the agencies have collected valuable information about strutting grounds and winter range on millions of public and private acres. About 11.5 million acres of sage grouse habitat occurs in southeastern Montana, but prior to these cooperative efforts, no more than ten percent of it had been intensively inventoried.

At present, 7 to 8 million acres have been inventoried for strutting grounds. Less than 300 strutting grounds were known to exist in 1990, but today there are nearly 650. The agencies monitor 200 of these annually.

Sage grouse winter range informa-

tion has also long been lacking. Recent cooperative efforts have identified many more winter grounds and key winter habitats. According to BLM wildlife biologist Kent Undlin, 25 winter grounds were recorded in 1990. Today that number exceeds 250, with the majority being identified in the past two to three years.

Due to the high demand for energy, including coal bed natural gas, much of the inventory effort is focused on areas



being developed or proposed for development. These inventories have allowed the BLM to identify crucial sage grouse habitats and, to the extent possible, provide protection for these important areas. Without the cooperation between BLM and FWP, this protection may have not occurred.

Further Study

In addition, the BLM and FWP are cooperatively funding research conducted by the University of Montana. This research, which began in the spring 2003, considers the potential impact of coal bed natural gas development on sage-grouse, examines the linkage of sage-grouse populations and habitats, and studies the impacts of West Nile Virus on sage-grouse.

Using this research, the BLM will be better able to evaluate the effectiveness of two stipulations designed to protect sage grouse in areas of mineral development: 1) a quarter-mile "No Surface Occupancy" buffer around strutting grounds; and 2) a two-mile buffer applied to grouse nesting areas

during the nesting season (controlled surface use). The research will also apply in more general terms; enabling the BLM to be proactive in managing uses on public lands affecting sage-grouse.

In addition, this research has helped the FWP better understand sage grouse population dynamics and habitat needs and use, allowing FWP to prioritize acquisition and management opportunities.

The Benefits of Partnerships

According to John Ensign, FWP game manager for Region Seven, neither the BLM nor the FWP could have accomplished singularly what they have done cooperatively. Following is a list of other ways the FWP and the BLM have cooperated in the conservation of sage grouse:

- Formal Challenge Cost Share agreements which identify the role of each agency in data collection;
- Annual coordination meetings to prioritize areas for inventory and prioritize target areas or populations for monitoring;
- The FWP has provided vehicles for BLM seasonal employees;
- The data base jointly developed by the agencies is now used throughout Montana in the collection and data storage of sage grouse information; and
- The FWP and the BLM provide support to other agencies in the development of projects which benefit sage grouse and its habitats.

For more information, please contact Dale Tribby, BLM Miles City Field Office, 111 Garryowen Road, (406)233-2812; or John Ensign, FWP, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301, (406)232-0921.



BE AWARE OF WILDLAND FIRE DANGER

Fire experts are predicting another severe fire season, and advise outdoor recreationists and homeowners to take extra precautions.

This spring's rainfall was welcome, but it did not reverse the effects of our sixth straight year of drought. Live fuel moisture levels are so low that even above-average levels of precipitation this year would do little to reduce the fire danger. As of mid-May, 35 wildland fires had already burned about 3,200 acres in Montana.

Although we can't do much to prevent fires from lightning strikes, we can reduce the chance of human-caused fires. Even the smallest spark has the potential to cause significant damage, so please:

- crush smokes dead out;
- never leave a campfire unattended;
- ensure that your vehicle has a properly installed spark arrester that is operational;
- stop and park only in areas clear of vegetation;
- observe all fire restrictions.

Take precautions, but always be prepared: carry a shovel, bucket and fire extinguisher. Also remember that cross country travel is not allowed on most federal and state lands.

In addition, homeowners in areas susceptible to wildland fires can take steps to protect their property. For tips on how to create defensible space, or for more information about fire restrictions and prevention, contact your local BLM office.

Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association meets on the first Tuesday of odd-numbered months at Fuddrucker's in Billings Heights. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please call Shirley Heffner at 259-1202, Cynthia Embretson at 252-1367, or send your address to Cynthia at ceatsage@wtp.net.

The Public Lands Foundation offers new retirees a free one-year membership. Please contact Bill Noble, PLF Montana Representative, at 406-656-0267 to join.

Please also help us keep our *Quarterly Steward* mailing list current by contacting Ann Boucher of the External Affairs staff at 406-896-5011 or aboucher@mt.blm.gov with address changes.

Retired from MT/Dakotas BLM since February 1, 2004:

Miles Joplin - 19 years
Physical Science Specialist, Miles City Field Office

John K. Bunce II - 35 years
Land Surveyor, Montana State Office

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